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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate a possible link between differences in parents' reactions to conflict involving their children and their children's older peers or siblings, and differences in their children's self-monitoring level. It was hypothesized that children who were high in self-monitoring would come from environments in which parental expectations differed in response to differences in context. A total of 34 mothers were administered the adult Self-Monitoring Scale and responded to 10 hypothetical situations. Their children completed the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale. Findings indicated a significant effect in regards to situation; all mothers adjusted their responses as a function of situation. In addition, mothers' attributions of responsibility for solving problems were a function of their and their children's self-monitoring status. Results are discussed in terms of parent personality, child personality, and the interaction between the two. (Author/RH)

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Choices in Parenting Strategies: A Link to Self-Monitoring

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to investigate the possible link between differences in parents' reactions to child conflict involving their own children and same-age, younger, or older peers, or older or younger siblings and differences in children's self-monitoring level. It was hypothesized that high self-monitoring children would be in environments where parental expectations differed in response to differences in context. Thirty four mothers were administered the adult Self-Monitoring Scale and responded to 10 hypothetical situations. Their children completed the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale. There was a significant effect for situation. All mothers adjusted their responses as a function of the situation. In addition, mothers' attributions of reponsibility for solving the problem were a function of their own self-monitoring status and the self-monitoring status of their children. Results are discussed in terms of parent personality, child personality, and the interaction between the two.

Choices in Parenting Strategies: A Link to Self-Monitoring

The link between parenting and child development has been the focus of many studies of socialization (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Examples of such research include the categorization of types of parenting styles and effects on child outcomes (Baumrind, 1967), the effect of structural variables (e.g., socioeconomic status) on parenting and child development (Zussman, 1981), and the linkages between parental abuse of children and child development (Main & George, 1985).

Researchers have also identified factors that influence the parenting patterns of mothers and fathers. Several variables have been identified as important predictors of individual differences in parenting. For example, stress has been identified as being related to parenting (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990), as have parental beliefs (Miller, 1988). Belsky has proposed a process model which includes developmental history of parents, marital relations, work, social support, personality and child characteristics (e.g., temperament) to better understand the determinants of parenting (Belsky, 1984). This paper reports on an investigation of two of the factors identified in Belsky's process model -- adult personality and child characteristics. Recognizing that both of these components are complex, multi-faceted constructs, one aspect of the personality construct, adult self-monitoring, and one child characteristic,

child self-monitoring, were investigated in terms of their relationship to parenting strategies.

Self-monitoring is a personality characteristic which influences the degree to which a person's behavior is a function of inner beliefs, attitudes, and feelings, or a function of the social situation (Graziano, Leone, Musser, & Lautenschlager, 1987; Snyder, 1979; 1987). A high self monitor is a person who is very sensitive to cues that define a particular situation. High self monitors use others as a means to gather and compare social information, and then as models for appropriate behavior. A high self monitor may be described as one who plays the role for which he/she is called as though performing different characters on stage. A low self monitor, on the other hand, is less attentive to social cues. This type of person usually tries to keep his/her behavior consistent across different situations. There is also an effort to maintain congruence between who the person is and what the person does. Low self monitors try to be "true" to themselves in all situations.

The final variable of interest for this study was parenting strategies. Parenting strategies were conceptualized as choices a parent makes in response to the child, the situation and/or a combination of the two. For the purpose of this project, parents' reactions to conflicts involving their own children and same-age, younger, or older peers and older or younger siblings were used due to the emphasis within the self-monitoring construct on either

attending to situational variation (high self monitors) or disregarding variability in context (low self monitors).

In sum, the research reported here investigated the link between parents' self-monitoring, children's self-monitoring, and the parents' reactions to typical conflict situations involving their child. It was hypothesized that high self-monitoring children would be in environments where parental expectations differed in response to differences in context. In addition, it was predicted that high self-monitoring parents would be more likely than low self-monitoring parents to report behavior changes consistent with situation changes.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were part of a larger study that examined the relationship of children's self-monitoring to peer popularity and self-esteem. The sample included one hundred and twenty four children and 47 parents. The children were elementary school children in grades 1-5 and their parents. The children attended two elementary schools in a small midwestern community and were primarily from working and middle class families. Data from 34 mother-child pairs are reported here. (Data was collected from fathers as well, but due to the small sample size fathers' data were excluded from the analyses.)

Mothers' Measures

Self-monitoring. The adult Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974; 1987) was constructed to measure self-monitoring in adults. It contains 18 items which represent five content areas. These content areas are (a) concern about social appropriateness, (b) attention to social comparison, (c) ability to control and modify one's self-presentation and expressive behavior, (d) the use of this ability in particular situations, and (e) the cross-situational consistency in expressive behavior and self-presentation. For example, one item reads "At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like." This item represents only the single area of being concerned about situational appropriateness. A high self monitor would answer false, as this type of behavior is not indicative of one who is concerned about self-presentation and situational appropriateness. Low self-monitors would indicate that this statement was true for them because it would be their intention to be themselves at social gatherings, regardless of whether or not this behavior really fit the situation.

The adult Self-Monitoring Scale has both reliability and validity. The internal consistency (Kuder Richardson 20) reliability of the scale is .70 (Snyder, 1987). Test-retest correlations range from .77 to .83 (Greaner & Penner, 1982; Kendzierski, cited in Snyder, 1987; Snyder, 1974). The construct

validity of the adult Self-Monitoring Scale has been assessed in a multitude of studies. For example, one study conducted by Snyder (1974) to validate the scale was done by using peer ratings. Males in a college fraternity rated fellow members on attributes of self monitoring. Attributes for high self monitors were those that indicated control of self-expression and sensitivity to social cues. Using a median split, fraternity members were classified as high or low self monitors. Members who were assessed as high or low self monitors using the adult Self-Monitoring Scale were also likely to be placed into the same category by members of the fraternity.

The adult scale also has good discriminant validity. For example, self-monitoring is not the same as the need for social approval. A measure of the need for social approval, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, is only slightly correlated with scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale. Correlations between self-monitoring and other personality measures are also low. These include the Performance Style Test, Machiavellianism, Achievement Anxiety Text, and inner-other directedness (Snyder, 1974; 1987).

Parenting Strategies Questionnaire. The Parenting Strategies Questionnaire consisted of ten hypothetical, yet typical, situations encountered by parents of school-age children. Of the ten scenarios, two involved the parent's child and a younger sibling. Two other stories involved the parent's child and an older sibling. The remaining stories involved the child and peers. Two of these

stories involved the child and a same-age peer, two involved the child and a younger peer, while the remaining two involved the child and an older peer. An example of one of the stories is: "Imagine that your child has a friend, Jan, who is two years younger. Jan and your child are busy playing a board game. In the middle of play, Jan pulls a card, decides he/she doesn't like it and chooses another. Your child protests loudly by saying, 'You can't do that, it's not fair!' Your child comes to you and explains the situation. How would you respond?"

The scenarios involving the older sibling both focused on situations where the target child was attempting to be a part of the older child's activity. Scenarios focusing on the target child and a younger sibling depicted the younger sibling as interfering in some way with the target child's activity.

Situations with same-age friends focused on experiences in which the friend and the target child were disagreeing on what to do or how to do something. Scenarios that involved an older friend described situations where the older child could do things that the younger, target child could not or would not do. The stories that involved a younger friend included one where the target child and the friend disagreed on rules and one where the younger friend could do something better than the target child.

Following each story, the parents were asked to respond to five questions using a Likert-type format. The first question asked the

parent whether her typical reaction to her child's situation would be positive (i.e., understanding, sympathetic) or negative (i.e., angry, annoyed, impatient). The second question was "Who would you think was responsible for the conflict?" The third question was "Who should be responsible for solving the problem?" The fourth question was "How capable do you think your child would be in solving the problem on his/her own?" The last question was "How likely would you be to help solve the conflict?" The stories were initially randomized and then given to each mother in the same order.

Children's Self-Monitoring

The Junior Self-Monitoring Scale (Graziano et al., 1987) is a 24 item yes-no scale. The scale was adapted from the adult self-monitoring scale to assess self-monitoring in children. The scale was constructed to correspond to the same content domains as those of the adult scale. Examples of items on this scale are: "When I don't know what to wear, I call my friends to see what they are going to wear" and "I do not usually say things just because other people want me to." The items are scored in the direction of high self-monitoring. High self-monitors agree with items expressing motives to behave appropriately (e.g., likely to know what classmates expect); to selectively attend to social information (e.g., watching others to see what to do); to behave in ways contrary to how they feel (e.g., being nice to disliked people); to

strategically control the impressions of others (e.g., clowning around to impress classmates); and to exhibit situationally specific behavior (e.g., acting better when the teacher is in the room than when he/she is out of the room). Conversely, low self-monitors would be expected to disagree with such statements.

The Junior Self-Monitoring Scale has a Kuder Richardson 20 reliability coefficient of .62, an average item-total correlation of .20, and a mean inter-item correlation of .07 (Graziano et al., 1987). Stability of the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale was assessed by Musser and Browne (1989). The 4-month test-retest reliability for first, third, and fifth graders was .55, the 10-month reliability was .49, and the 14-month reliability was .52.

Preliminary evidence suggests that the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale has good construct validity (Graziano, et al., 1987). Additional evidence for the construct validity of the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale was obtained by Musser and Browne (1989). Based on the assumption that high self-monitors make more use of socially appropriate situational cues, this behavior should be evident when they are given a task where this option can be exercised. Results indicated that children who were high self-monitors generally chose to use social information more frequently than low self-monitors, and also spent more time looking at available social information. Scores on the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale are moderately related to

introversion-extroversion, but not to psychoticism, and neuroticism. These relationships are similar to those found for the adult scale.

Procedure

Children and mothers completed the scales in the late Spring of the school year. All of the children completed the scales in conjunction with data collection for the larger project while at school, in individual sessions. All of the children responded to the self-monitoring questions on a micro-computer[1]. The first and second graders were read the questions, while the third, fourth and fifth graders read the questions on their own. Mothers were administered the scales either in a small group setting on the university campus or in their home (depending on what was most convenient for them). The Adult Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1979) was administered first followed by the Parenting Strategies Questionnaire.

Results

Mothers' responses to the hypothetical situations were analyzed with a 2 (mothers' self-monitoring status: high, low) x 2 (children's self-monitoring status: high, low) x 5 (situation: older, younger, same-age friend; older, younger sibling) repeated measures MANOVA, followed by univariate ANOVAs. Dependent variables were mothers' responses on 5-point Likert-type scales, to questions concerning: (a) typical affective reaction, (b) responsibility for

conflict, (c) who should solve the problem, (d) capability of child to solve the problem, and (e) how likely mother would be to help.

There was a significant multivariate effect for situation, F (20, 476) = 7.09, $p < .0001$. In addition, the ANOVAs for each of the questions yielded a significant effect for situation (all Fs > 2.9). Means are presented in Table 1. These results indicate that all mothers varied their behavior with the situation. For example, mothers thought that in situations with older friends, the older child should be more responsible for solving the problem and mothers indicated they would be less likely to help.

In addition, there were several significant effects and interactions for the question of responsibility for solving the problem. These were subsumed under a 3-way interaction between parent's self-monitoring, child's self-monitoring, and situation, $F(4, 120) = 2.65$, $p < .05$. Means are graphed in Figure 1. These results indicate that mothers of high self-monitors place responsibility for problem solving on the child when situationally appropriate. Mothers of low self-monitors were less likely to alter expectations.

Once the means for attributions of responsibility for solving the problem were graphed, it became apparent that the observed differences in mothers' responses were primarily due to whether the situation involved a sibling as well as whether the other child in the scenario was older or younger. To analyze this difference more

directly, the situations involving the same-age friends were dropped from further analyses. In addition, the same-age friend situation rarely has a comparable family situation (i.e., same-age sibling).

Mothers' responses to question three (responsibility for solving the conflict) were then analyzed with a 2 (mother's self-monitoring status) x 2 (child's self-monitoring status) x 2 (family relationship: sibling/ friend) x 2 (age-of-the-other child) repeated measures ANOVA. The family relationship variable and the age-of-the-other child were the repeated measures. There was a significant effect for family relationship, $F(1, 132) = 5.23$, $p < .05$ and for age-of-the-other child, $F(1, 132) = 45.24$, $p < .0001$. Mothers thought that their own child should be more responsible for solving the conflict when within the family than when with peers. In addition, mothers thought that their own child should be more responsible for solving the conflict if with a younger child than with an older child. However, these two main effects were qualified by a family relationship by age-of-the-other-child interaction, $F(1, 132) = 3.39$, $p<.05$. These means are presented in Table 2. In general, mothers attributed more responsibility for solving the problem to the other child when the other child was older and outside the family and the most responsibility to their own child when the other child was younger and outside the family.

Mothers' responses were also a function of child self-monitoring, $F(1,132) = 20.00$, $p<.001$. Mothers of high self-

monitoring children tended to attribute equal responsibility to both children involved in the conflict situation, whereas the mothers of the low self-monitoring children tended to place more responsibility on their own child.

There was also a significant three-way interaction between family relationship, mother's self-monitoring, and child's self-monitoring, $F(1,132) = 13.20$, $p<.001$. Means are graphed in Figure 2. Two two-way interactions, one between family relationship and mothers' self-monitoring, $F(1,132) = 4.66$, $p<.05$ and one between family relationship and child's self-monitoring, $F(1,132) = 39.31$, $p<.0001$, were consistent with the three-way interaction. When the other child was a family member, mothers of high self-monitoring children tended to attribute equal responsibility for solving the problem to their own child and the other child, while mothers of low self-monitoring children tended to attribute responsibility to their own child. The difference between the family and non-family situations was most pronounced for high self-monitoring mothers with low self-monitoring children.

In addition, there was a three-way interaction between age-of-the-other-child, mother's self-monitoring and childs' self-monitoring, $F(1, 132) = 37.55$, $p<.0001$. Means are graphed in Figure 3. Two two-way interactions, one between age-of-the-other-child and mother's self-monitoring, $F(1, 132) = 16.45$, $p<.0001$, and one between age-of-the-other-child and child's self-monitoring,

F (1, 132) = 17.65, p <.0001, were consistent with the three-way interaction. Mothers of high self-monitoring children appeared to be more flexible across situations, expecting their child to be less responsible when interacting with an older child in conflict situations, while mothers of low self-monitoring children expected their child to assume responsibility in conflict situations regardless of the age of the child. The difference between situations with older and younger other children was greatest for low self-monitoring mothers with high self-monitoring children.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between mothers' self-monitoring, child's self-monitoring and differences in mother's reactions to child conflict. The two conflict situations investigated in this study were age-of-the-other-child (younger, older) and whether the other child was a family member or not. Based on the results, it is clear that mothers do vary their expectations for their children's behavior depending on the situation. More specifically, if the child was in a conflict situation with a younger child, the mother tended to attribute more responsibility to her own child. Such results are consistent with what one would typically expect.

Perhaps of more interest were the results indicating that the degree to which mothers expect their child to assume responsibility was related to the mother's and the child's personality. If one

assumes that the mother's personality influences the child's personality, one may note that the mothers of high self-monitoring children may be encouraging a "give and take" relationship among their child and other children, particularly for sibling relationships. Mothers of the low self-monitoring children tended to expect the most from their own child when it came to assuming responsibility for solving a problem with another child, especially a sibling. Whether this is situationally appropriate or not is open to discussion; however, if one assumes that relationships within a family should be more egalitarian, then mothers of low self-monitoring children had less situationally appropriate expectations for their children.

In terms of the younger versus older conflict situations, the mothers of the high self-monitoring children varied their expectations based on the situation. The mothers did not expect their child to be as responsible for solving the problem in situations involving other children who were older. Such results may indicate that the mothers of the high self-monitoring children may be more attuned to the situational constraints on the child, thus promoting more attention to the situation on the part of the child. Given the nature of this study such interpretations are highly speculative, yet the results do suggest that researchers studying parental beliefs and behaviors should attend to parent and child personality variables.

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Author Notes

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Footnotes

[1]The computer program used for the administration of the Junior Self-Monitoring Scale was developed by David J. Pittenger and William G. Graziano. Development of this program was supported by National Science Foundation Grant #1021RR187085. Copyright for the program is held by the University of Georgia.

Table 1

Mother Responses to Children's Behavior as Function of the Situation

Questions	Situations Presented in Scenarios: Child with younger sibling	Child with older sibling	Child with same-age friend	Child with younger friend	Child with older friend
Typical reaction[a]	3.75a (.88)	3.51a (.99)	3.34a (.80)	4.01b (.78)	4.10b (.73)
Responsible for conflict[b]	3.97b (.75)	2.69a (.97)	2.87a (.51)	2.96a (.54)	4.16b (.56)
Responsible for solving[c]	2.66a (.94)	2.81a (.93)	2.60a (.52)	2.59a (.54)	4.16b (.56)
Capability[d]	2.18a (.90)	2.74b (.88)	2.47a (.74)	2.38a (.91)	2.46b (.83)
Offer help[e]	1.94a (.66)	2.12a (.96)	2.26b (.91)	2.16a (.91)	2.43b (.91)

Note. Numbers in table are means. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

[a] This question read: Would your typical reaction to your child's situation be positive (i.e., understanding, sympathetic) or negative (i.e., angry, annoyed, impatient)?, where 1 = mostly negative and 5 = mostly positive.

[b] This question read: Who would you think was responsible for conflict?, where 1 = your child and 5 = other child.

[c] This question read: Who should be responsible for solving the problem?, where 1 = your child and 5 = other child.

[d] This question read: How capable do you think your child would be in solving the problem on their own?, where 1 = very capable and 5 = not very capable.

[e] This question read: How likely would you be to help solve the conflict?, where 1 = very likely and 5 = not very likely at all.

Within each question (across rows) means not sharing the same subscript are significantly different at $p < .05$ by Duncan's Multiple Range Test.

Table 2

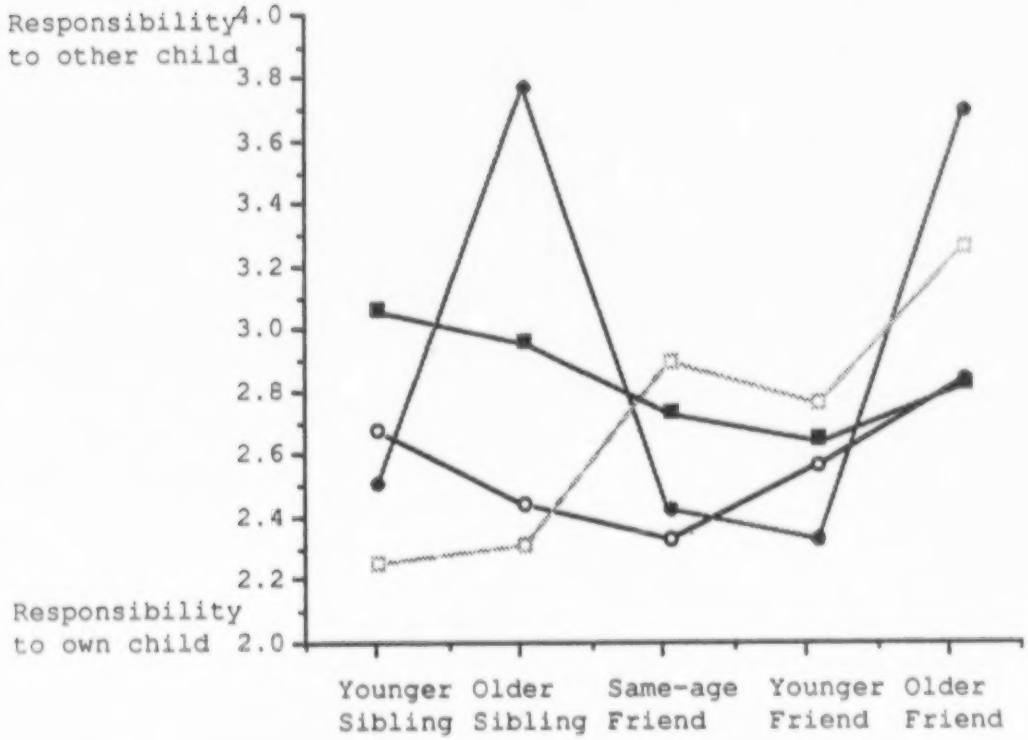
Mothers' Attributions of Responsibility for Solving the Problem as a Function of Family Relationship and Age-of-Other-Child

	Family Relationship	
Age-of-Other-Child	Sibling	Peer
Younger	2.66 (.94)	2.59 (.54)
Older	2.81 (.93)	3.07 (.87)

Note. Numbers in table are means. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Question read "Who should be responsible for solving the problem?" with a 1 indicating the mother's child and a 5 indicating the other child.

Figure 1

Mothers' Placement of Responsibility for Solving the Problem as a Function of Parents' Self-Monitoring Status, Childs' Self-Monitoring Status, and the Situation



Low self-monitoring parent & low self-monitoring child

Low self-monitoring parent & high self-monitoring child

High self-monitoring parent & low self-monitoring child

High self-monitoring parent & high self-monitoring child

Figure 2

Mothers' Placement of Responsibility for Solving the Problem as a Function of Mother's Self-Monitoring Status, Child's Self-Monitoring Status and Family Relationship

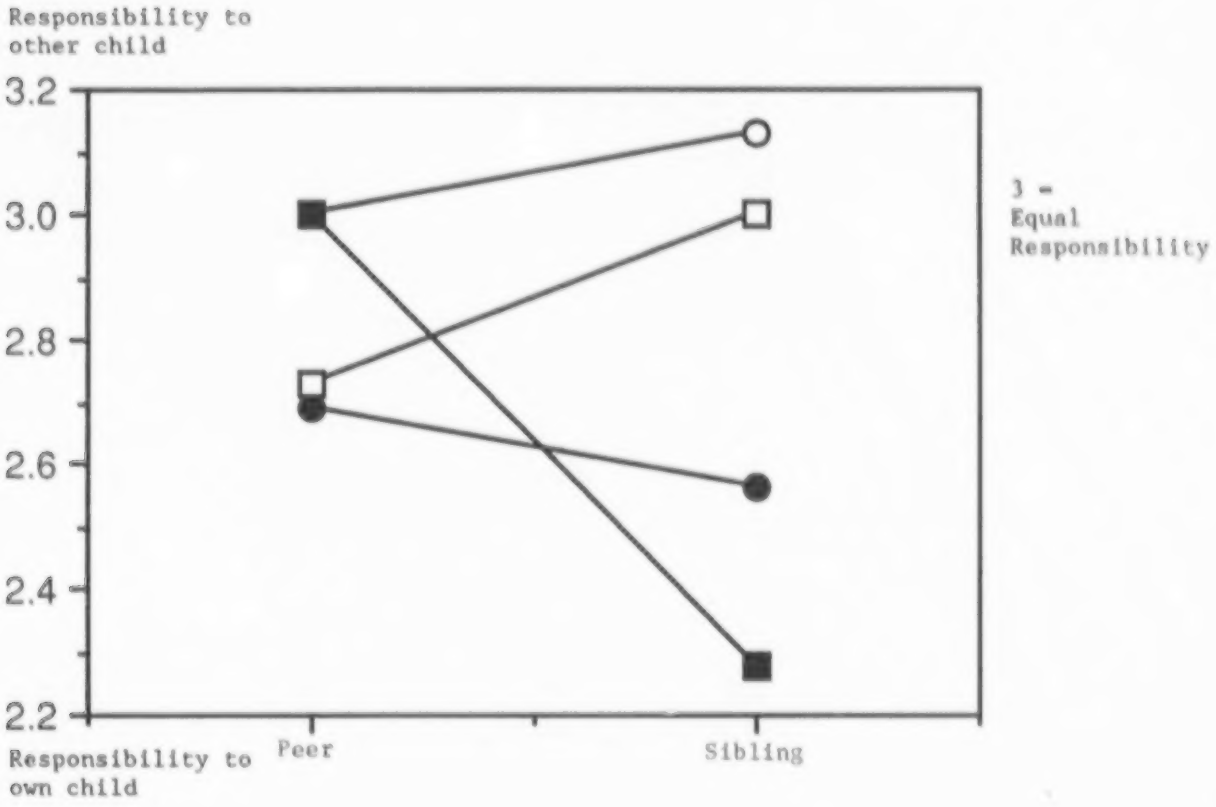
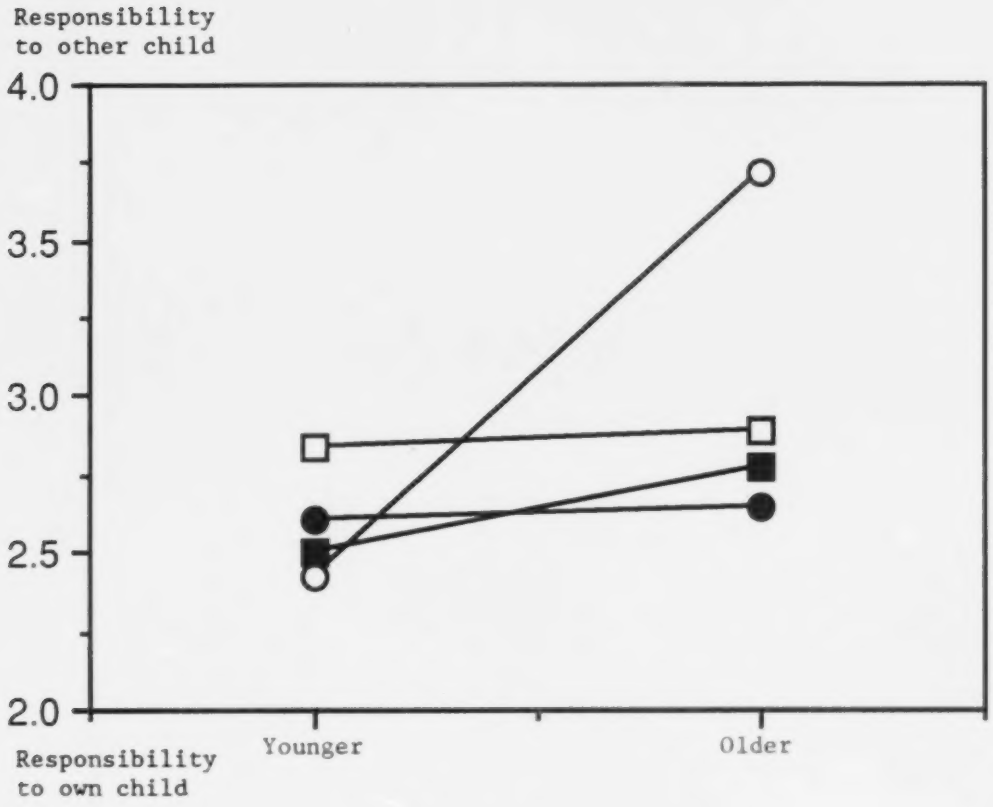
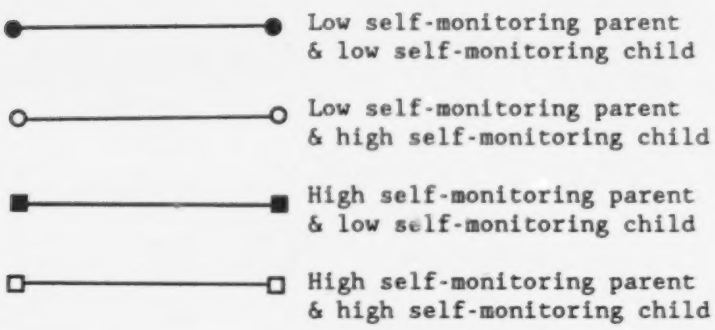


Figure 3

Mothers' Placement of Responsibility for Solving the Problem as a Function of Mother's Self-Monitoring Status, Child's Self-Monitoring Status and Age-of-theOther Child




Low self-monitoring parent & low self-monitoring child
Low self-monitoring parent & high self-monitoring child
High self-monitoring parent & low self-monitoring child
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